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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001100

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA, PM/FO  
ALSO FOR IO A/S SILVERBERG AND PDAS WARLICK  
P FOR HERRO MUSTAFA  
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/KUMAR/PHEE  
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER/GAVITO

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: SAUDIS GIVING SAAD ONE LAST CHANCE, SAUDI  
AMBASSADOR SAYS

REF: BAGHDAD 2298

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. William Grant for reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Saudi Ambassador to Lebanon Khoja told Charge July 25 that the March 14 majority must win the 2009 parliamentary elections to avoid an Iranian takeover of the country. Critical of majority leader Saad Hariri, Khoja said the Saudi leaders had told Saad recently that they would provide significant financial support for him and March 14 in the 2009 elections, but Saad must use it wisely; that 2009 is his "last chance." Khoja stressed the need for Saad to work more closely with his March 14 partners, resolve intra-March 14 Christian in-fighting, and to reach out to opposition groups and Shia. Khoja believed Michel Murr and his son, Defense Minister Elias Murr, could also play a significant role in boosting March 14's electoral prospects.

2. (C) Khoja expressed concern that PM Siniora would not be able to resist the opposition's efforts to shape the ministerial statement to parliament, and urged that the Special Tribunal be accelerated to demonstrate results before the elections. End summary.

SAAD'S LAST CHANCE

3. (C) Charge Grant, accompanied by A/DCM, met with Saudi Ambassador to Lebanon Abed al-Aziz Khoja on July 25 at his residence in Beirut. Saad's March 14 majority had no other choice but to win the 2009 parliamentary elections, Khoja began; otherwise Iran would run Lebanon "one hundred percent." Iran will do whatever it can to rule Lebanon, and if the opposition wins the elections, it will control the country for the next 30 years, he warned. Most Christians will then leave the country, changing the confessional nature that makes it unique. If we lose Lebanon, we lose the region, he said.

4. (C) Khoja said that the Saudis had told majority leader Saad Hariri "frankly" during Saad's recent trip to the Kingdom that that they were unhappy with recent developments in Lebanon and that the 2009 parliamentary elections were "his last chance." Khoja indicated clearly that the Saudis will provide significant financial support to Hariri to help

March 14 in the election, but warned Saad he must use it wisely. Implicitly criticizing Saad's advisors, Khoja said he had told Saad he needed to surround himself with a professional team. He further told him that he needed to meet regularly with his March 14 allies, agreeing that Saad spent too much time in Saudi Arabia, when he needed to be attending business at home. (Note: Saad traveled to Morocco the same day to pay a condolence call on the Saudi King, who reportedly was vacationing there. End note.)

¶5. (C) Khoja agreed that Christian in-fighting within March 14 posed a problem for Saad, as demonstrated in the recent battles over cabinet formation. Citing Christian MP Michel Pharoan's threat to leave the party and the Qornet Shewan bloc's opposition to Saad's advisor Ghattas Khoury, Khoja said Saudi Arabia had tried to help "in one way or another," but ultimately March 14 members themselves needed to figure out how to resolve this problem.

¶6. (C) Khoja also agreed that Saad should receive members of the Armenian opposition Tashnaq party, who had been unsuccessful in securing a meeting with him. "He has to bring them back," he said, adding that he would tell Saad to see them. The problem, he explained, is that one of "Saad's people" tells him Tashnaq is a "hopeless cause." Saad needs to think more strategically, he argued, and realize that his enemies today might be his friends tomorrow.

¶7. (C) Finally, Khoja agreed that Saad needed to forge stronger ties with the Shia. He called Saad's recent trip to Iraq (reftel) "theoretically" good for improving Sunni-Shia

BEIRUT 00001100 002 OF 002

relations in Lebanon, but stressed the need to build upon the visit by conducting more frequent visits. Warning that building better Sunni-Shia relations was "a very dangerous and not an easy task," Khoja said Saad and his team needed to approach this in professional manner. He expressed doubt that Saad's current team of advisors was well formed for outreach to Shia.

¶8. (C) Khoja also suggested that Saudi Arabia and the U.S. encourage Michel Murr and his son, Defense Minister Elias Murr, to play a bigger role. Khoja applauded the close U.S. relationship with Elias, saying this would help give him confidence.

CONCERNED OPPOSITION WILL  
WEAR SINIORA DOWN ON  
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

¶9. (C) Khoja expressed concern about how long PM Siniora could resist the opposition's efforts to water down the ministerial statement to parliament. Siniora let us down before, he noted, by accepting Syrian Socialist National Party member Ali Qanso in the cabinet. Khoja claimed the French had convinced Saad to accept Qanso, with Saad then convincing Siniora, but the majority had received nothing in return.

SPEED UP SPECIAL TRIBUNAL

¶10. (C) On Syria, Khoja stressed the need to accelerate the Special Tribunal as the "only way" to pressure Damascus. This must be done before the 2009 parliamentary elections, he said; it is no use if it is delayed.

¶11. (C) Khoja predicted that Syria would try to "contain" President Sleiman, whom Khoja dubbed originally "one of them," warning that the Syrians were "on the ground" in Lebanon and would try to take Sleiman back. Sleiman was a good man, Khoja said, and agreed he was trying to walk a middle road between the majority and opposition.

COMMENT

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¶12. (C) Khoja was frank in telling us that the Saudi leadership was unhappy with recent developments in Lebanon and Saad Hariri's performance in particular. He made clear, though, that despite that dissatisfaction, the Saudis will provide significant financial support to Saad and March 14 to use in the 2009 elections as they see fit. We share Khoja's criticisms of Saad recent performance, as well as Khoja's proposals for what Saad needs to do next to lead March 14 to victory in 2009. Indeed, we have stressed many of the same messages in our meetings with Saad. We hope the Saudi warning will cause Saad to begin earnestly doing the work on the ground needed to win the elections. End comment.  
GRANT